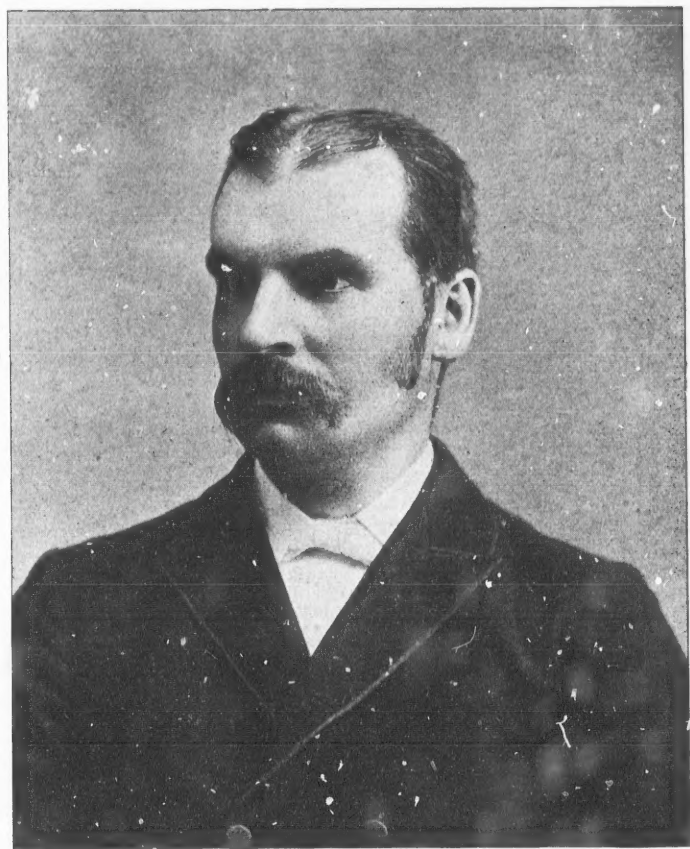


**Tennyson's Message
to Our Generation**

Rev. David Sutherland





TENNYSON'S MESSAGE TO
OUR GENERATION

A LECTURE

BY REV. DAVID SUTHERLAND

"Through darkness up to God."



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TENNYSON'S MESSAGE

TO OUR GENERATION

An adequate conception of the place and mission of the poet in the world is a problem many have sought to solve. To the solution of that problem two of the foremost singers of our generation have yielded their contribution. In his lyrical introduction to *The Earthly Paradise*, William Morris says :

"Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
Or bring again the pleasure of past years,
Nor for my words shall ye forget your tears,
Or hope again for aught that I can say,
The idle singer of an empty day.

"Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,
Telling a tale not too importunate
To those who in the sleepy regions stay,
Lulled by the singer of an empty day."

Alfred Tennyson sharply and emphatically contradicts the theory which would make the poet an idle singer of an empty day. According to him true poets are the prophets of their time, the seers

“Who saw through life and death, through good and ill,
Saw through their own soul.
The marvel of the Everlasting Will
An open scroll
Before them lay.”

It is because I accept Tennyson's interpretation of the function of the poet, and because I believe that he himself furnishes an illustrious example of that interpretation, that I have given to this lecture the title of *Tennyson's Message to Our Generation*.

A popular and highly respected clergyman in England dared to say some years ago: “I am clearing out all the theological works from my library and replacing them by the poets; it is there that I find the really popular theology; there that I find the thoughts of the ordinary men and women with whom one has most to do in the course of ministerial work. Most of the theologians are bare, dry, and unattractive—they speak the language of ages that are dead, not the tongue that is understood of the people. They are fossilized remnants of a creed outworn. In the poets I find the living thoughts of the men and women with whom I have to do.” This I believe to be too sweeping an indictment of the theology and too high an eulogy of the poetry of to-day, but facts force me to admit that Browning, Tennyson and George Macdonald have exercised a greater influence on the moulding of contemporary theological thought than any dozen of the most famous theological teachers of our century. Some of you may

remember how in that magnificent prose fragment on *The Defence of Poetry*, one of the brightest stars in the firmament of song compares the function of the poet with that of the prophet of old, showing how the latter is in reality the preacher of righteousness rather than the predictor of future events, the man of *insight* rather than of *foresight*, the *fortkteller* of eternal truths rather than the *foreteller* of things which are to come to pass. Accepting this definition and limitation of the prophetic function, every intelligent hearer must be prepared to give a place to the poets of Christendom among the prophets of God in the present dispensation. More : every unprejudiced reader of current literature must be ready to admit that if you would feel the true warm religious emotion of men's hearts rather than the cold conventional thoughts of their minds, you must turn to the songs of certain poets rather than to the writings of certain theologians. Some may explain this anomaly by bewailing the weakness of theology in our generation. Others will explain it by emphasizing the strength of poetry in our generation. Accept which explanation you please, the fact remains to be faced and considered.

Facing and considering the prophetic function of true poetry, you realize the very close and intimate connection which exists between all noble poetry and religious thought. Remember that religious thought is not by any means—as some of them seem to be inclined to say—the special and peculiar property of theologians. It is the splendid heritage of all men ; and of those who have used it few have made better and grander use than the great poets of the world, especially including the great English poets of to-day. If a careful review of history manifests one fact more than any other, it is

that the ages of the most intense and well regulated religious life have been also the ages marked by the noblest and most helpful poetry. "Poetry is faith," was the saying of a great critic, and assuredly without living faith true poetry is impossible. For when you study them carefully you will find that the themes of religious thought and noble poetry are practically identical. God, man, nature, faith, hope, love, life, death, eternity—these are the master themes of all truly great and noble poetry, and surely they are also the key-facts of truly religious thought.

But at this point an essential difference between theology and poetry has to be noted. Theology, as a science, is of necessity more precise and accurate than poetry, which by the laws of its nature belongs to art. This must never be forgotten when estimating the relative values of theological and poetical statements of the same truth. "Much harm has unquestionably been done by the hasty acceptance of some graceful but very inadequate and likely erroneous poetical effusion upon some of the great questions of religious thought. On the other hand, however, we must also remember that poetry expresses its views with a felicity, a grace, an elegance, a force, which prose, and especially bare prose, is utterly unable to rival, and that consequently the poetic dicta in regard to these themes appeal to a far more immediate and often a far deeper and more permanent influence than the thoughts of others upon the very same subjects when expressed in bald and perhaps unattractive prose. As the saintly George Herbert puts it,

"A verse may find him whom a sermon flies."

It is very significant that the two mightiest singers of our age, Browning and Tennyson, were seers as well as singers. They have opened up to us the freshness of life and the wonder of God's presence in all things. In the deepest sense they are our teachers, for they reveal mysteries and suggest meanings. They put their readers into sympathetic touch with things above the world of sense, things beyond our power of definition, things beyond the range of sight and sound, things that are called mystical but which are by no means unreal. Such things the poet-prophet, and the poet-prophet alone, can make us see and feel. The philosopher and the theologian have their own methods of interpreting the mysteries of the unseen, but these methods do not carry along with them the sweetness of manner and the fitness of utterance that belong to the method of the poet who is also a prophet. Many who never read the catechisms of the schools will read the poet's songs, and be moved to nobler things as they picture to the mind the beauty of being good and the strong nature of the faith that ever trusts and loves.

Alfred Tennyson is in a special sense the poet-prophet of the nineteenth century. Shakespeare belongs to all the ages, but only a child of our age could have written *In Memoriam*, for it reflects all the confused greatness, the almost boundless hope and the almost hopeless despair, the dignity and the littleness of our complex but fascinating period. The singer of that marvellous song was more a voice in the air than a figure in the streets, dwelling apart in the solitude which is the mother-country of all strong souls, yet keeping in such close touch with the thought of the time that, as some one puts it, he uttered its deepest longings, its ghastliest fears, its

blackest doubts, its brightest hopes, and its most sacred beliefs. Tennyson takes us behind the creeds and the forms about which the conflicts of controversy have raged, to the living spirit that inspired them all, and makes us feel how passing and temporary are the creeds and forms, and how eternal is the love of God. He leads us through the darkest valleys of Apollyon, but he does not leave us there, for if we follow him all the way he will escort us to the Beulah Land where the light shines sweet and fair, and where heavenly voices tell us we shall walk in night no more. The bells peal out loudly and triumphantly

“That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.”

I invite your patient and careful consideration for a little time this evening to the message of this notable and characteristic poet-prophet.

To the prophet there must come the hour of call and vision. It came to Alfred Tennyson with the writing of *The Lady of Shalott*. He had been a dreamy and sentimental lad, living in a world of egotistic sentiment and visionary castle-building. The Byronic fashion of the time held him in its evil spell. When, a boy of fifteen, he heard the news of Byron's death, he thought the heavens had fallen. He could do nothing but wander by the banks of a river and say over and over again, “Byron is dead! Byron is dead!” But as the days rolled on the sunlight of a nobler conception of life penetrated the clouds of a false and selfish sentimentalism. How the change came about he who has eyes to see may read in

the earliest of the splendid series of poems which for sixty years ministered to the truth and beauty of Anglo-Saxon thought. Cloistered in her pride of ladyhood, and shielded by the conventional protections of her social position, the Lady of Shalott weaves her web of fancy. Her face is turned towards the realm of mere imaginings and her back is towards the actual world of suffering and strife and sorrow.

“There she weaves by night and day
A magic web of colors gay,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she—
The Lady of Shalott.”

But as she weaves shadows and forgets realities, she happens to look into her magic mirror, and a vision of the world's woe goes like an arrow to her heart.

“Through the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights,
And music, went to Camelot :
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed ;
'I am half-sick of shadows,' said
The Lady of Shalott.”

Henceforward she can never be the same.

“She had slept and dreamt that life was beauty ;
She awoke and found that life was duty.”

The same idea echoes through other poems of that period of waiting and groping for the work that was to dominate the poet's life. The dawning manhood, “half-sick of the shadows” of empty sentiment and mere intellectual enjoyment, changed the centre of its aspiration and achievement from self to humanity, flinging

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itself forward with the ardor of a great passion into the kindredship of love and struggle, of pain and tears, of sympathy and toil for the brotherhood of man.

"Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with
might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, passed in music out of
sight."

It was the vision of something nobler than the web of fancy and love, of something stronger than self, that gave Alfred Tennyson the power to see and to say his message for our generation.

The long-expected and eagerly-welcomed biography of Tennyson is more than a mere record of what he did and wrote. It is also an interpretation of his message. There was no discord between the singer and his song. He lived a brave and beautiful life. The exaggerations of certain peculiarities and the misconceptions fostered by certain irresponsible stories fade away, and we see clearly for the first time the man, so simple in his thorough simplicity, so devoted to the highest ideals of his art, and so absorbed in the solemnities and mysteries of the universe, that he was ever content to keep the upper windows of his mind open to the holy winds and the pure lights of heaven. Admirers of the poet are thankful to have an authoritative assurance that he was not the rough, gruff, unkindly being so many reports picture. On the contrary, what he valued most, and valued more and more as life advanced, was kindness, love between man and man. The note he struck in one of the earliest of his poems—

"Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood."—

ruled the melody of his music, and formed an important part of his message to a generation in which the pressure of merciless competition and the selfish pursuit of personal pleasure tend to make men forgetful of the poor, the weak, and the sad. It is gratifying to know that Tennyson lived from first to last in the spirit of humanitarianism, that he believed most firmly in the brotherhood of man. Incidents from the biography reveal this very clearly.

"Some of us have been accustomed to think of this poet as the writer who appeals to the aristocratic side of English life, the writer who has been most appreciated by the cultured; but the peculiarity of Tennyson as a man was his constant sympathy with the poor and his comparative indifference to the great. His son tells us that he was also very particular about his children being courteous to the poor, and the severest punishment that he ever inflicted upon his eldest son, the writer of the biography, was for some want of respect to one of the servants.

"Passing on to some years later, when the poet was fifty-five, he was as pleased as a child with a letter that was sent to him by a district visitor who had read parts of *Enoch Arden* to her poor women, and then in visiting one of them a short time after, and offering her a tract, the poor woman took the tract with gratitude, but said, 'I would give all I have for that other beautiful tract which you read the other day; it did me a power of good.' Tennyson was never better pleased than when he learned that his great and beautiful and touching poem, *Enoch Arden*, had served the purpose of a tract for a district visitor.

"Passing on a little later in his life, when he was now

an old man of seventy-four, he received a letter from a working-man who poured out his troubles to the great poet, and Tennyson sent this answer, 'I am grieved for your loneliness and your sorrow. Let me hope that you, having, as I think, found the God of love, will feel day by day less lonely, for loving God you cannot but grow in love towards your fellow men, and so forget yourself in them, since love begets love.' It was in the next year of his life that he received a coronet. He became a member of the House of Peers, and now was the time for testing the reality of his early line that 'Kind hearts are more than coronets.' Accordingly we find him writing a letter just after the honor had been conferred, in which he says, 'I have received many letters of congratulation, some from great lords and ladies, but the affectionate remembrance of good old Susan Epton'—who was a domestic servant of his mother's—'touched me more than all these.' It was just after he had been raised to the peerage that he wrote that beautiful letter to the old blind blacksmith at Sheffield in which he said, 'I should have a heart harder than your anvil if I were not deeply interested by what you tell me. I thank you for your pretty verses. By writing such verses you will always have work of the noblest and best to do.' And coming on to the latest year of his life, when he was now eighty-three years of age, he was charmed by an ill-spelt and ungrammatical letter written to him by an old working-man of the same age as himself: 'My poor congratulations,' said the old man, 'and good wishes are as sincere and true, although echoed from a poor cottage, as those echoed from a palace.' The old poet closed his life with the same sentiment with which his literary celebrity began—

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“ ‘Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood’—

“emphasizing both by word and deed the great truth that the true aristocracy is of the order of those who scatter seeds of kindness along life's hard and dusty pathway, so that pilgrims weary with the burdens of the way may take new heart and courage.”

The poet has been defined to be “God's prophet of the beautiful,” and certainly Alfred Tennyson carried a message of beauty to his generation. Duty is grimly realistic, and deals with the prose of life. To be sweetened and strengthened it requires the companionship of beauty. Tennyson is pre-eminently the poet of beauty. No poet has ever pictured Nature with such truth and felicity as he, for no one has ever seen her as he has. An eminent critic has declared that Tennyson is not haunted by the desire of Wordsworth to render in verse an exact likeness of the scene he gazes on, but that while in essence always faithful to truth he steepes his landscapes with the colors of his own thought. But this criticism does not correspond with the facts of the case. It is characteristic of Tennyson's habit in the observation of Nature, as W. J. Dawson puts it, that “he never coins a false phrase about the humblest flower that blows, for the sake of the felicity of the phrase and at the expense of the tints of the flower. He tells us precisely what he has seen. If he tells us that ‘in the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast,’ and ‘a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove,’ we may be quite sure that he has watched the robin and the dove, and written with his eyes on them rather than on the paper.” The consequence of this fidelity to Nature is that Tennyson is constantly startling us with the vivid

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accuracy of his descriptions. The open-eyed wonder of the farmer when the poet pointed out to him that the buds of the ash in March, before springing, were jet black, gives added point to that striking description of a woman's hair—

“More black than ash-buds in the front of March.”

“No one before Tennyson had seen that the nightingale's eyes flash very fire as its throat pulses with the rapture of its song. No man save Tennyson could have seen or said this—of the heavy brigade, with the clank of its gallop, charging and disappearing amid the grey mass of Russian infantry—

“‘When our own good redcoats sank from sight,
Like drops of blood in a dark-gray sea.’”

Tennyson's message of the beautiful speaks also in the matchless melody and felicity of his phrases. This is the art in which his rarest excellence lies, the art of musical expression, the subtle cadence of rhythm which produces a recurring and never forgotten sweetness. Some of his lyrics afford the nearest approach to the effect of fine music which language is able to produce, and in witching beauty they stand alone in English poetry. Examples rise by the score to the mind, but I will content myself with one from *The Princess*—

“Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn,
The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees.”

In these lines there is an overpowering imaginative charm, something almost magical in its bewitchment which throws even Keats into the shade. It is melody, the finest and most magical melody of which words are

capable, and it carries strains of sweetness into the language of all lovers of poetry who reproduce and perpetuate the music of our greatest prophet of the beautiful.

But Tennyson's message of beauty reaches its climax and its noblest expression in his emphasis upon the beauty of holiness. In the *Idyls of the King* he has drawn for us, not, perhaps, with perfect originality, but certainly with singular felicity of phrase and manner, the battle of the soul with most of the temptations that beset men in life, magnifying the grandeur of noble ideals, and portraying with exquisite grace the strength and the weakness of man and the helps and the hindrances to the higher life. The story must be familiar to all—how the King got his throne, and how he so ruled that men who doubted whence he came or his right to be King, felt themselves drawn by his presence and bound themselves in loyalty by his imperative vows. "Then," as Prof. Rentoul puts it, "they rose to wage his wars in his strength, and in their very faces flashed his likeness and his beauty. And on the battlefield of actual life God's fire descended on him, and none doubted he was King. Each knight that had vowed the King's vows fought as with his arm, and dared as with his might, till, by-and-by, treason and disloyalty subtly working among the knights, the realm was weakened, and the King fell at last, worn and wounded, but victor still; and then there came the passing of the King to be crowned far off with nobler life and power."

What does Tennyson mean by this?

"King Arthur, Tennyson explicitly tells us, means 'not that gray King' whose name is as a hoary moss clinging to cairn and cromlech. He means the war of

sense against the soul of man—the Christ-illuminated conscience in man—with its categorical imperative, saying to the turbulent fleshly powers, ‘Thou shalt, and shalt obey, and do my bidding, and fight my wars.’ Through and by union with the purified flesh they must be fought. The King must wed with Guinevere—pure soul with bodily sense—lifting it to his own spiritual height and purpose :

“ ‘ For saving I be joined
To her that is fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing on the mighty world,
And cannot will my will, nor work my work
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
Victor and lord. But were I joined with her,
Then might we live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live.’ ”

“ So, when the King rises in the audience-hall of Conscience to pronounce judgment and doom, the doubting and hesitating knights doubt no more.

“ ‘ Then the King, in low, deep tones,
And simple words of great authority,
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,
That when they rose knighted from kneeling,
. I beheld
From eye to eye through all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King.’ ”

“ Beside the King, to help him at his need, stood

“ ‘ Three fair queens,*
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur.’ ”

“ The epic tells how Sir Gareth, in the first loyalty

* Faith, and Hope, and Love.

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of that great vow, went forth to conquer the giant temptings and doubts that beset our youth, our manhood, and our age ; and found the secret of undying life through love, and loyalty, and duty. Then the tempting of sense ate in, and then the wild madness of mystic enthusiasms fell upon the knights. But the King's place is on the level of life's common woe, and toil, and joy, and tears ruling this life-kingdom in the daily struggle, till at last the King (the soul) falls, smitten on the helm and wounded, but unconquered. He goes from doing, and from battle, and from the shadows, to be crowned in larger life and light. On this great modern epic, with its manifold interest for the complex problems of our modern thought and life, a lecture of interest and profit might be written. Meanwhile, only one thing let me emphasize. The highest light comes not in those mystic searchings, the raptures, the quest after the mysterious Holy Grail. To the life ruling its passions, fighting its doubts, helping its brothers in the need of toil and difficulty, at the table round of duty to the King—there the light comes, in secret moments when none know. Yea—

“ ‘ Many a time they come,
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
This air that smites his forehead is not air
But vision—yea, his very hand and foot—
In moments when he feels he cannot die,
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
Who rose again. ’ ”

While Tennyson has touched, with more or less success, almost every stop in the great organ of poetry, the strongest impression he leaves upon the mind is that he

is essentially a religious poet, and it is in the realm of religious poetry that his noblest work is to be found. It is an omen of hope written large upon the literature of the Victorian Era that men's thoughts as mirrored therein have been most largely taken up with the questions of faith. In the two greatest poets of the period, Tennyson and Browning, the influence of religion is most deeply to be traced. These two give most adequate expression to what is noblest and best in the religious thought and feeling of the last fifty years—to that strong and living faith which is not troubled with the changes of the world, which is sure that "God fulfils Himself in many ways," which penetrates beneath the troubled, movable surface of the creeds to the spirit that quickeneth.

It is as yet too early to estimate the obligation of our age to Tennyson. To create hope in the hearts of men heavy with the depressing doubts of a transition stage in theological and scientific development is a more splendid achievement than to fill the barns or frame the laws of a country. Tennyson has done this, for he has brought quickening and hopefulness back to our weary generation. The poet-prophet of all that is high and holy in life, he makes men feel the weakness and irrationality of unbelief, and the strength and saneness of belief. The one thing that is certain to his mind is the existence of an "increasing purpose that through the ages runs." The world is not a system of forces that grind on blindly, but it is ordered within the thought of God. Love is Lord and King of all; and "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him."

The long-expected and eagerly-welcomed biography of Tennyson shows clearly how faith was the inspiration

of the poet's life as well as of his poetry. At home and in his ordinary moods he was one of the most simple-hearted among the faithful, receiving the Bible like a little child, and sitting at the feet of Christ with all the unquestioning devotion of an ardent disciple. "Assuredly," his son testifies, "religion was no nebulous abstraction for him. He consistently emphasized his own belief in what he called the eternal truths—in an omnipotent, omnipresent, all-loving God, who has revealed Himself through the human attribute of the highest self-sacrificing love; in the freedom of the human will; and in the immortality of the soul. "That great veracity of soul," which so capable a critic as Theodore Watts, himself a thinker and a poet of large reputation, says was the dominant characteristic of Tennyson, came from the fidelity with which he clung to these fundamental truths. What differentiated him from singers like Swinburne and Matthew Arnold was his overwhelming conviction of the truth that the one hope of mankind lies in God revealed in Jesus Christ. This is written large in his poems, and it is amply attested in the glimpses of his mind furnished by his biographer. Everywhere Christ is lifted up, exalted, adored as the one Saviour of humanity. Look at the story of little Emmie in the *Children's Hospital*. The doctor sneered at her faith in Christ, and said that "the good Lord Jesus has had his day." She is told to pray to him to-night, and lest He should pass through the crowd in the ward, and not know who is praying, she put her arms out, and said, "It's the little girl with her arms lying out on the counterpane." Next the nurse says:

"He had brought his ghastly tools: we believed her asleep again—
Her dear, long, lean, little arms lying out on the counterpane;

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Say that His day is done! Ah why should we care what they say?
The Lord of the children had heard her, and Emmie had passed
away."

Emmie is the type of humanity, and the one hope for the sorrows and pains of the world lies in the power of Christ. The critic who would say that this is mere sentiment on Tennyson's part is silenced by the facts and testimonies of his life. One day a friend, who was walking with the poet in his garden, asked him, "What do you think of Christ?" After a reverent pause, he replied, "Look, here is a flower: what the sun is to this flower, Jesus Christ is to me." The light, beauty and fragrance of the poetry of Alfred Tennyson all came from the "Strong Son of God, Immortal Love," in whom he lived, moved and had his being. It is a remarkable fact that in a century which more than any other century has cast doubt and discredit upon the future life, the man who beyond all question was the greatest man in England in the century, the man who has exercised the widest influence and been most universally known and loved, should have been from first to last the prophet of the faith that the soul cannot die. That Alfred Tennyson realized the dignity and grandeur of this service is evident. On one occasion, when he had received from one of his friends an expression of passionate admiration and gratitude, he said, in his simple and modest way: "I do not know what I have done to make men feel like that to me, except that I have kept my faith in immortality." What greater and more needful help could be given to a generation ever treading in the shadows of death than to keep the lamp of immortality burning bright in the years of doubt and darkness? The prophetic function of Tennyson appears

in clear relief when the certainty of his faith is contrasted with the uncertainty of faith which characterized his illustrious contemporary, George Eliot, that wonderful writer and influential teacher. Concerning her, one who knew her well—F. W. H. Myers, the poet, the critic and the pioneer of psychical research—writes these impressive words: "I remember how, at Cambridge, I walked with her once in the Fellows' Garden of Trinity, on an evening of rainy May; and she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-calls of men—the words God, Immortality, Duty—pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the *third*. Never, perhaps, have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and uncompromising Law. I listened, and night fell; her grave, majestic countenance turned toward me like a sibyl's in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp one by one the two scrolls of promise, and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fate. And when we stood at length and parted, amid that columnar circuit of the forest trees, beneath the last twilight of starless skies, I seemed to be gazing, like Titus at Jerusalem, on vacant seats and empty halls—on a sanctuary with no presence to hallow it and Heaven left lonely of a God."

Contrast with that scene, so vividly described by a master of noble prose, the scene presented by the deathbed of Alfred Tennyson, which is in itself one of the most majestic poems of modern life, and you will comprehend the reason why George Eliot is already a spent force in English literature while the influence of

Tennyson grows with the years. The scene is thus described :

“On Monday, October 4, 1892, at eight o'clock, he asked for his beloved Shakespeare, and the play of *Cymbeline* was given to him. He found a passage on which his finger rested when he died. It was that beautiful line which Posthumus utters to his restored Imogen, when she threw herself on his breast : ‘Hang there like fruit, my soul, till the tree rots.’ This line was beautiful to the poet, and his finger pointed to it when he lay dying. Two days after this his doctor told him of an old villager ninety years of age, who, when dying, had so much pined to see his old bedridden wife once more that they had carried her to him where he lay. He pressed his shrunken hand on her hand and said, ‘Come soon,’ and presently passed away. Tennyson murmured, ‘True faith,’ and the tears were in his voice ; suddenly he put the question to the doctor in one word, ‘Death?’ and the doctor bowed his head, and the poet said, ‘That is well.’ In the late afternoon of that day he suddenly exclaimed, ‘I have opened it.’ Perhaps his thoughts were with the line of his own poem where he speaks of death as the opener of the gate. Perhaps he meant that he had just opened the gate of death through which he would pass presently. Then he blessed his wife and son, and for the next hours the full moon, which Mr. Watts Dunton says somehow seems to shine more brightly at Aldworth than anywhere else in England, flooded the great landscape outside with light. ‘And we watched,’ says his son, ‘in solemn stillness. His patience and quiet strength had power on those who were nearest and dearest to him. We felt thankful for the love and for the utter peace of

it all, and his own lines of comfort from *In Memoriam* were strongly borne in upon us. He was quite restful, holding my wife's hand. And as he was passing away I spoke over him his own prayer, "God accept him, Christ receive him," because I knew that he would have wished it. He looked very grand and peaceful, with the deep furrows of thought almost smoothed away, and the old clergyman stood by the bed with his hands raised and said: "Lord Tennyson, God has taken you who made you a prince of men—farewell!"

Such a death was Heaven's own seal of approval upon a life nobly lived and upon a message faithfully delivered. Fabled stories tell of how the swan sings a song of surpassing sweetness in the hour of death, and it was given unto the swan of nineteenth century poetry, so lily-white in creed and deed and word, to sing his most beautiful song shortly before he crossed the bar which separates time from eternity.

"Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

"But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

"Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

"For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar."

"That," says Henry Van Dyke, "is perfect poetry—simple even to the verge of austerity, yet rich with all the suggestions of wide ocean and waning light and vesper bells; easy to understand and full of music, yet opening inward to a truth which has no words, and pointing onward to a vision which transcends all forms; it is a delight and a consolation, a song for mortal ears, and a prelude to the larger music of immortality."

Alfred Tennyson has crossed the bar, and now he sees his Pilot face to face. Though he has gone from earth for ever, the message of Duty and Beauty, of God and Immortality, he sang so sweetly and powerfully, remains to gladden and strengthen humanity. Because of this has been granted unto him the fulfilment of the aspiration so wistfully voiced by George Eliot:

"Oh, may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence: live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues."

